

vary sharply. One view held during the 1920s by various Zionist and British officials suggests that the Marj was an empty wilderness full of swamps. In early 1920, Herbert Samuel, Palestine's first High Commissioner, had the following to report to the British administration:

The whole aspect of the valley has been changed. The wooden huts of the villages, gradually giving place to the re-roofed cottages, are dotted along the slopes; the plantations of rapidly growing eucalyptus trees already begin to give new character to the landscape; in the spring the fields of vegetables or of cereals cover many miles of the lands, and what five years ago was little better than a wilderness is being transformed before our eyes into a smiling countryside. (5)

Samuel's description of the Marj was reiterated by various writers. Recent authors who adhered to the same point of view have qualified their argument about the emptiness of the inland plain, the Marj, by claiming that "Unsettled Beduin tribes", throughout the Ottoman period raided and attacked the settled peasants and drove them out of the Marj. Speaking on this issue, A. Cohen writes:

During this period...[the Ottoman period] gravest danger to the villages came from the Beduins. When local rule was weak, strong Beduin tribes raided peasant settlements, looted their crops and animals, killed their men and destroyed their property...The Beduins, practically dominated the country.. Insecurity of life and of property made settled living in the villages and plains difficult, and often impossible". (Cohen, 1965: pp 4-5)

Similar arguments are also made by other authors (Migdal, 1980; Ohana, 1981). Arguments presented so far, at the least, can be described as baseless contentions produced to justify European Jewish settlement.

A largely ignored description of the Marj provides contrary